THE ART OF J.J. HILDER

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Grey Landscape
In the possession of the Trustees of the Hilder Estate

9¼ x 9½ ins.

THE ART OF J. J. HILDER

EDITED BY
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& BERTRAM STEVENS

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THE ART OF
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J. J. HILDER

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INTRODUCTION

BY JULIAN ASHTON

IN every realm of creation, man's achievements in the graphic and plastic arts are perhaps the most amazing. The materials and tools he has to work with to-day differ but little from those he used a thousand years ago. The same clay and coloured earths, the same rough brushes and modelling tools have, under the direction of his brain and hand, produced the masterpieces of the past, as they are still producing the artistic triumphs of to-day.

In England some years ago, great interest was aroused by the discovery of large quantities of Babylonian tiles covered with cuneiform inscriptions, which the savants of the day were greatly exercised in deciphering. I was taken to the British Museum to see these cartloads of little flat tiles, about four by five inches in size. I thought them very uninteresting until I was shown one, inscribed upon which were the forms of half-a-dozen geese led by a most pompous gander. This tile was dated "Probably 4,000 B.C." The birds were excellently observed and most artistically presented—the work, no doubt, of some ingenious vagabond whose sense of humour induced him to insert into the kiln, along with the laborious cuneiform writings, this biting satire upon the flat-footed and pretentious wiseacres of his day.

Think for a moment of the simplicity of means by which this antique link reaches us down the centuries! A little slab of damp clay, a pointed stick, an observing eye, and a work of art has resulted which will continue to interest humanity when the very names of the Pharaohs are forgotten.

> "All passes. ART alone
> Enduring stays to us;
> The Bust outlasts the throne,—
> The Coin, Tiberius."

The function of the artist has always been the same. He steps across the ages more or less gallantly, bearing the brimming cup of human emotions so that unborn generations may taste the

noble vintage for which their forefathers so often were rewarded with the pillory or the cross.

The daily renewing marvel of dawn, the blinding glare of mid-day, night's purple silences, have ever been the backgrounds into which the artist wrought his high and varied designs.

The activities of man, his passions, desires, and quenchless curiosity, Nature's infinite varied moods—these, tinged with the beauty underlying life, have ever been the foundations on which the artist has reared a treasure house of delight for the tired spirit of man.

Is it fantastical to believe that the ideals upon which our boasted civilization stands are false? Can it be possible that the artist with his cult of Beauty is the true prophet bringing to mankind a new evangel, the evangel of the magic of Life in all its forms? Who can say what scourges and disasters, what waste of Life and Love, we might have been spared if the song of Beauty had penetrated more deeply the heart of humanity? For while man has ever looked for salvation and hope to the sky-line, the artist has ever proclaimed that hope and salvation lie at our feet.

When the great upheaval through which we are stumbling shall have so far passed away that we are able to take up the task of reconstruction, do we cherish a vain hope that the happiness of the race demands simplification of its aims, so that the material wants of life shall not entirely submerge our spiritual and emotional needs? Upon the recognition of these needs in man's brief passage from the Unknown to the Unknowable, the artist bases his claim for consideration. His the task to fire adventure, to light the beacon of hope, to drive away monotony and so help our weary understanding to some conception of the beauty which lies unseen around us all.

Here, in the youngest of the world's democracies, already gleam a small band of stars which, like the pointers to our Southern Cross, mark the course we must travel to the new ideals. And here it was in our midst that there lived and passed away, before reaching the zenith of his powers, one of those who are rarely endowed. His highest achievements will outlive both the vagaries

Coogee
In the possession of the National Art Gallery of N.S.W. (Presented by Howard Hinton, Esq.)

PLATE I.
9½ x 8. ins.

of Fashion and the ravages of Time. This book is dedicated to his life's work, but I can imagine no more noble memorial to an artist than this tribute from a friend in Sydney :—

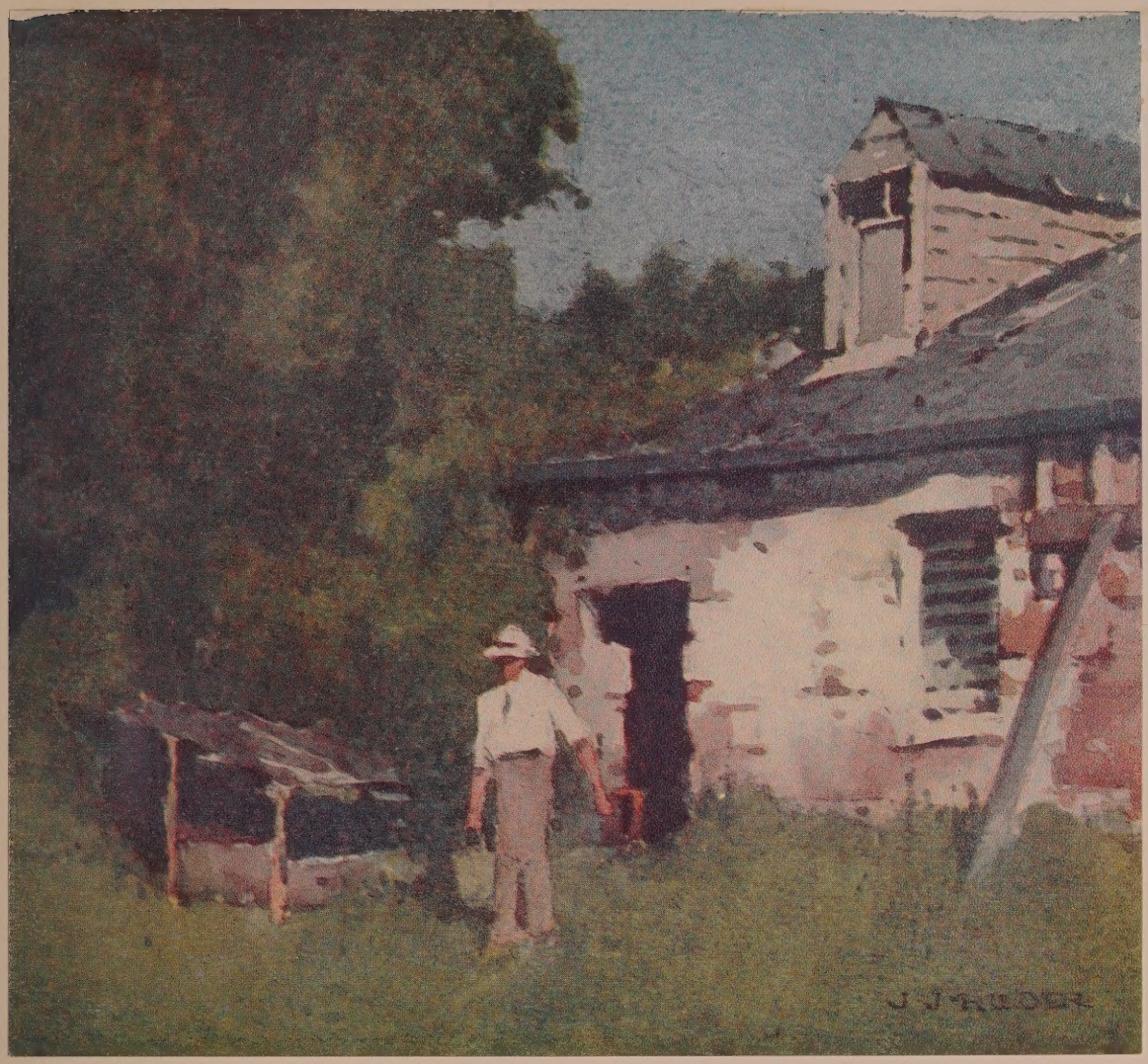
" Often, in a disturbed mood, wrapt in black thoughts, I go to our National Gallery and sit in front of the 'Hilders,' and by and by I come away filled with peace."

GOES the artist to his rest,
Leaving hill and sky and sea.
Look upon his peerless best,
Each a singing memory.

Dead? Ah, no, you cannot die
Till your well-loved work grows faint.
Strange to think gold once could buy
Lover's daydreams done in paint.

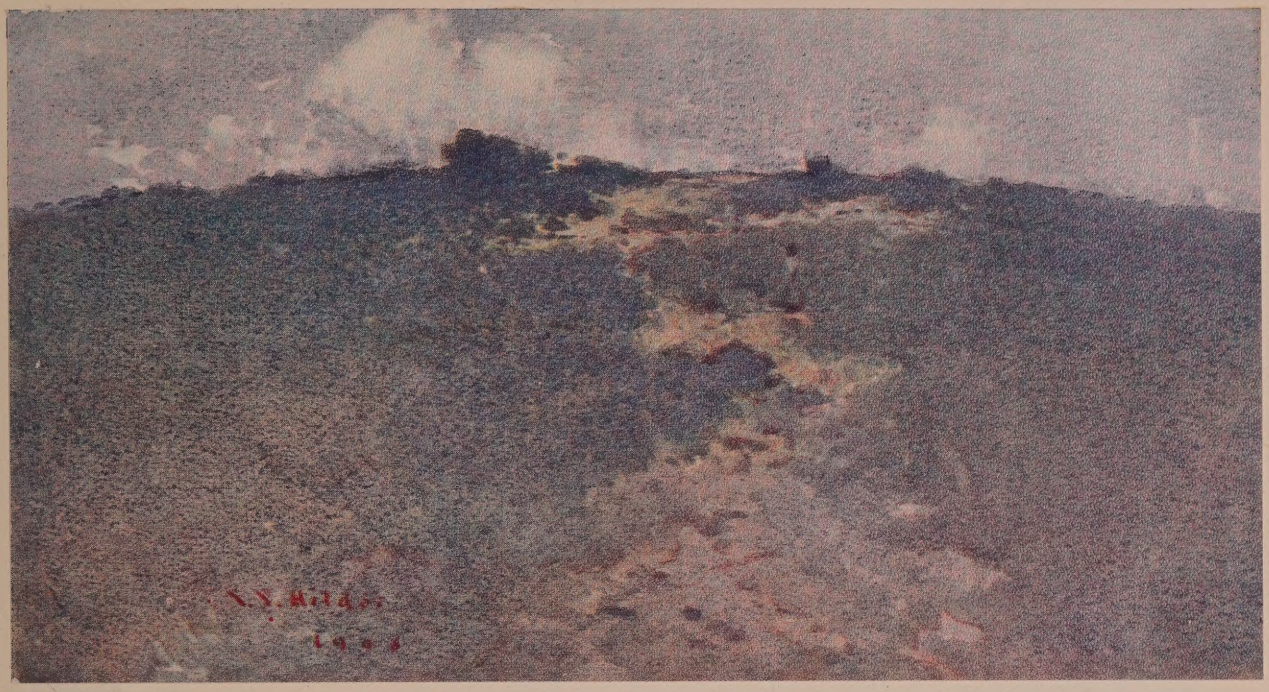
ERNEST O'FERRALL

13th April, 1916



The Farmhouse
In the possession of
Mrs. S. Paterson
Sydney

PLATE II.
7¼ x 6⅝ ins.



The Hill
In the possession of
Mrs. L. Abrahams
Melbourne

PLATE III.
12¾ x 7 ins.

The Crest of the Hill
In the possession of
Sir W. Baldwin Spencer
Melbourne

PLATE IV.
21 x 19 ins.

Ti-Tree Creek
In the possession of
J. C. Traill, Esq.
Melbourne

PLATE V.
9⅞ x 8 ins.

The Bridge
In the possession of
Sir W. Baldwin Spencer
Melbourne

PLATE VI.
15 x 15⅔ ins.

Morning
In the possession of
J. C. Traill, Esq.
Melbourne

PLATE VIII.
9¼ x 13⅜ ins.

Old Cottage, Ryde
In the possession of
Dr. S. A. Smith
Sydney

PLATE IX.
9¾ x 7⅝ ins.

The Fisherman's Cottage
In the possession of
Sir W. Baldwin Spencer
Melbourne

PLATE X.
10 x 4⅜ ins.

The Brick Kiln
In the possession of
J. C. Traill, Esq.
Melbourne

PLATE XI.
8¾ x 7¾ ins.

The Distant City
In the possession of
H. E. Starke, Esq.
Melbourne

PLATE XII.
9 x 11⅞ ins.

Landscape Study
In the possession of
the Trustees of the Hilder
Estate

PLATE XIII.
5⅜ x 11⅜ ins.

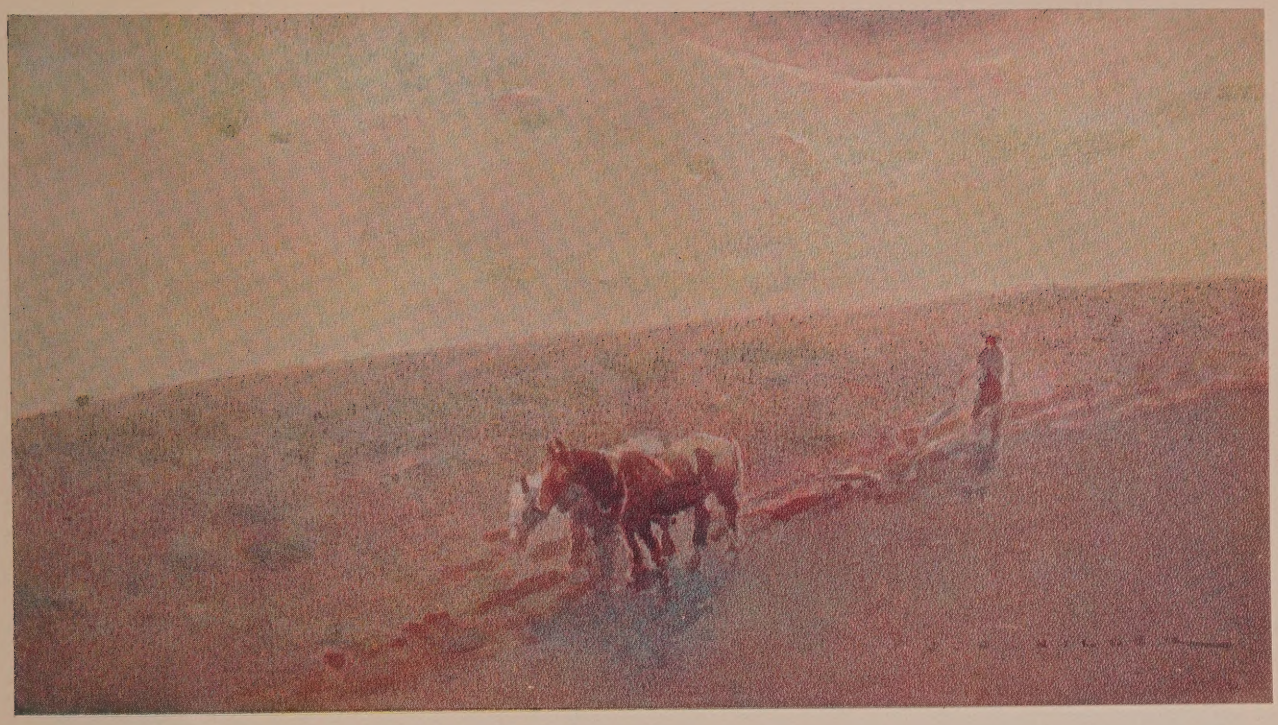
The Deviation

In the possession of
Mrs. R. E. H. Hope
Adelaide

PLATE XIV.
28 x 20¼ ins.

Southerly on the Harbour
In the possession of
Howard Hinton, Esq.
Sydney

PLATE XV.
11 x 7⅞ ins.



Winter Ploughing
In the possession of
E. Grüner, Esq.
Sydney

PLATE XVI.
12 x 7 ins.

The Boathouse

In the possession of the National Art Gallery of N.S.W. (Presented by Howard Hinton, Esq.)

PLATE XVII.
$9\frac{3}{4}$ x $7\frac{1}{4}$ ins.

The Plough
In the possession of
Sir W. Baldwin Spencer
Melbourne

PLATE XVIII.
8¾ x 7 ins.

Reflections
(*Oil painting*)
In the possession of
Howard Hinton, Esq.
Sydney

PLATE XX.
11¼ x 7¼ ins.

The Noontide Heat
In the possession of
Howard Hinton, Esq.
Sydney

PLATE XXI.
12 x 10¾ ins.

Sunlight
In the possession of
H. Jefferson, Esq.
Sydney

PLATE XXII.
8 x 5½ ins.

Dora Creek
In the possession of the Trustees of the Hilder Estate

PLATE XXIII.
8½ x 8½ ins.

Brisbane River
In the possession of the National Art Gallery of N.S.W. (*Presented by Howard Hinton, Esq.*)

PLATE XXIV.
$8\frac{3}{4}$ x 7 ins.

Lennox Bridge
In the possession of the National Art Gallery of N.S.W. (*Presented by Howard Hinton, Esq.*)

PLATE XXV.
10½ x 5½ ins.

Excavation, Bay Road
In the possession of the Trustees of the Hilder Estate

PLATE XXVI.
7⅜ x 7¾ ins.

Morning in the Gardens
In the possession of the National Art Gallery of N.S.W. (Presented by Howard Hinton, Esq.)

PLATE XXVII.
9 x 8 ins.

Country Road
In the possession of the Trustees of the Hilder Estate

PLATE XXVIII.
13¾ x 15¼ ins.

Timber-getters' Camp
In the possession of
Howard Hinton, Esq.
Sydney

PLATE XXIX.
11 x 7½ ins.

JESSE JEWHURST HILDER

BY BERTRAM STEVENS

AUSTRALIA may well be proud of Jesse Hilder, for he is entirely her own by birth and training. His art was intuitive; what instruction he received, and the inspiration he got from other men's work, helped him but little towards self-development. His water-colours show the strong individual note of the true romantic artist; they are not like anything done previously in Australia or elsewhere. His achievement would be remarkable in any circumstances; much more so will it appear when one considers the difficulties against which he struggled.

One artist friend of his regrets that Hilder did not have an opportunity of studying the methods of the great masters of water-colour, as his colour-sense was so good that an early acquaintance with the best technique would have enabled him quickly to reach the highest rank. As Hilder was one who took his own where he found it, he would no doubt have gained much from a direct knowledge of the masters, and his nature was so independent that he would certainly not have followed slavishly any school or tradition.

Hilder had that passionate delight in colour which is the gift of the gods, and cannot be imparted by any teacher. For the greater part of his thirty-five years his chief interest was the expression of beauty in colour. With only a brief period of instruction in the art of drawing, he did not really begin his painter's career until he was twenty-six and had learned that he was in the grip of consumption—the disease which was to harass him for the rest of his life.

His work in colour is like that of Keats in poetry; the earliest sketches representing the period of wonder and expectancy in which the poet wrote "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill"; then came the 1907 water-colours with their emphatic tones like the notes of exaggerated passion in "Endymion"; and his later work, ending with the subtler and more spiritual beauty of the last two

or three years, akin to the great odes and sonnets of the English poet whom he admired so much.

Hilder's water-colours have that distinction which makes him one of the aristocracy of art. I do not know whether posterity will rank him beside the great masters of his medium; but he is, at any rate, of their company, and takes no mean place amongst the romantic water-colourists of the world.

That such an artist should appear comparatively early in the history of art in this country will be of increasing interest to Australians, and justifies the telling of his life-story while the memory of his friends is still vivid. It is a chronicle of small events—of a life outwardly unimportant, but lit by the undying flame, and sustained by a proud courage in a long struggle against malignant Fate.

Neither his parents nor any member of the family had any particular interest in art. His father, Henry Hilder, was an engineer of moderate means, and the son of an engineer. Henry Hilder came from Sussex, England, to Australia, and at Toowoomba, in Queensland, his eighth child, Jesse Jewhurst, was born on the 23rd July, 1881. All the children were fond of music; some of them played the pianoforte, and one the violin, with more than average proficiency. Jesse never studied music after boyhood; but he had the ability to memorize elaborate compositions for the pianoforte, and to play by ear with accuracy and feeling.

The family removed to Brisbane, and Jesse was in due time sent to the State primary school in the suburb called Fortitude Valley. At the end of 1894, at a little over thirteen, he won a scholarship which entitled him to three years free education at the Brisbane Boys' Grammar School, which he entered in February, 1895. He remained there until October, 1897, leaving soon after he had passed the Junior Public Examination held by the University of Sydney in Brisbane, where there was as yet no local University. He had passed in History, English, Latin, German, and Arithmetic. He entered the Bank of New South Wales, Brisbane, in April, 1898, as a probationer, and became a full member of the staff in the following July.

JESSE JEWHURST HILDER

Jesse Hilder seems to have been a likeable and popular boy at school, but not conspicuous in sports or studies. He always held a creditable place in form, and the official report is that he was "neat and intelligent." He played tennis, but never got into the school "four." In football, however, he belonged to the second team at the Grammar School, and was promoted to the first fifteen just before he left. One of his schoolfellows, Mr. Reginald Scott, remembers him as always smiling, fond of practical jokes and of drawing sailing boats and steamers during school hours.

Jesse was a lover of animals, and had a gift of winning their affection. His great delight as a boy was to play with "Major," a retriever dog which used to accompany him to the corner of the street every morning that Jesse went to school, and rush down to meet him on his way home in the afternoon. This continued after Jesse went to work at the Bank; and Major was his constant companion on sketching tramps till it died, in 1906. While at Young he had for a time a dog named "Orpheus," belonging to a member of Mr. Lane Mullins' family. Orpheus became very fond of Jesse, slept on his bed every night, and would not allow anyone else to touch him. Frequently on Saturday mornings he took it to the Bank with him. On one such occasion a man came in to cash a cheque, bringing with him a much larger dog than Orpheus. The big dog attacked the little one, whereupon Hilder rushed from behind the counter, drove it out, and chased it down the street with stones, leaving his cash at the mercy of the customer. When Orpheus had to be returned to its owner, Jesse was as grieved as if he had lost a human friend, and in his later letters often inquired about it.

The Brisbane River, being near his mother's house, afforded the boy many opportunities for sailing, especially as his eldest brother owned a boat. He constructed a raft and made many solitary excursions on it, often coming home drenched after a capsize. But it was not until he made friends with a party of oystermen who brought their spoils from Moreton Bay up the river to the city, that he came to know the excitement of sailing on wider spaces. The oystermen liked the shy boy who was so keenly interested in boats, and took him with them several times

on trips of a few days at a time, during which Jesse slept in the boat or at the men's huts on Moreton Island. Once or twice they capsized in a gale, and narrowly escaped drowning. On calm days Jesse drank in the beauty of the Bay, which he afterwards reproduced in several of his water-colours.

As a boy in Brisbane he developed his talent for drawing to some extent, and pored over a couple of volumes of "Royal Academy Pictures." Some of the half-tone engravings in these volumes he carefully copied with the pen, suggesting the tone by an elaborate cross-hatching which produced a finer effect than the engraver's mechanical process. Two or three of these, drawn at the age of fifteen or sixteen, are reproduced here. In later years he made some careful pen drawings, which show that he would have gone far in that medium had he devoted himself to it. He was, however, always more interested in colour than in black and white. At a very early age he had played with coloured chalks and paints as many children do; but he soon found out the limitations of a cheap box of paints, and saved his pocket money until he had enough to buy some "real paints." He treated these with affectionate care, as in fact he did all his belongings.

A few of the small landscapes painted by him in his early youth were shown to Mr. G. H. Addison, an architect in Brisbane, and an amateur water-colourist, who gave him practical advice and encouragement. Mr. William Jenner, a capable artist, then an old man, also saw them, and praised them for their promise.

In February, 1901, Hilder was transferred from Brisbane to a branch of the Bank at Goulburn, New South Wales, and in June, 1902, from Goulburn to Bega, a town in a beautiful part of the South Coast district. Though his work at Bega was more arduous and unpleasant than any he had hitherto done, he had as compensation the company of some sympathetic people who exercised a beneficial influence upon him. The quiet, introspective youth lived at "The Rectory" with Mrs. Newton and her family, by whom he was warmly appreciated. He was a frequent visitor at the house of Mrs. Arthur Wren, who lived a little way out of the town, and joined the week-end sketching expeditions which

J. J. Hilder
At the age of 10

J. J. Hilder
At the age of 14

J. J. Hilder in 1902

she got up. Mrs. Wren, who was herself a painter and gifted with excellent taste, recognised the remarkable promise of Hilder's colour sketches, and often urged him to leave the Bank and give his whole time to painting. Her praise of his first sketches upset him—he told her afterwards that it gave him a headache. He hated office work, and wanted to be an artist very much indeed, but could hardly believe that the little pictures he made for his own pleasure had any selling value. Mrs. Wren did not know that Hilder was not in a position to make the plunge she advised. His father had died in 1902, and his mother and sisters were largely dependent upon a brother and himself, and he knew that, at the best, art in Australia offered but a meagre and uncertain return to a beginner.

After Hilder left Bega, in April, 1904, Miss Newton sent him a pound which she had received from Mrs. Jeffreys, of Delegate, for a water-colour he had left at the Rectory. Hilder was highly delighted over his first sale and said, more or less jocularly, that the prospect of embarking upon an independent artistic career now seemed near. In return for her service as agent, he sent Miss Newton a copy of Fitzgerald's Omar with a bookplate drawn by himself. This design is reproduced here with Miss Newton's consent.

It was at Bega that Hilder got the germs of consumption, but he does not seem to have been seriously affected by the disease until some time after he came to Sydney. The Bank had appointed him to a suburban branch at Waverley, near the sea. Shortly after his arrival he fell ill and acquired a cough which he could not shake off. The Bank granted him a month's leave, after which he was somewhat better. The sea air was probably injurious, and the lonely life he lived for some time tended to depress him. He wrote to Miss Newton that for "the first six months of my stay in Sydney I saw no one and did nothing." Then he became acquainted with Dr. Moffitt, brother of his Bega friend, Mrs. Wren. Mrs. Wren's letter of introduction recommended them to be friendly as they had a failing in common—the inability to make friends. Dr. Moffitt was greatly interested in the tall, shy young man, and liked the little water-colour sketches

he showed him, so when, towards the end of 1904, he was appointed to the staff of Callan Park Hospital he invited Hilder to visit him as often as he liked.

"He used to come there regularly every Saturday afternoon," writes Dr. Moffitt, "and stop until Sunday night, and by the end of a year he became quite part of the place. The life there appealed to his retiring, somewhat nervous temperament, for he came to know the various officials and members of the staff in an easy, unconventional way, meeting them in the billiard room, on the cricket ground or elsewhere. At times he would get away by himself in the hall, where he would play the piano, an instrument which he respected, probably, more than he understood in those days.

"For the rest, he wandered about the grounds on his own, and would sketch, either in pen and ink or in colour, anything that anyone asked him to do. In this way one or two members of the staff became possessed of beautiful little gems of colour—vine-covered gates, sunsets, towers, or what not, and I have even hauled him out of bed at night to negotiate a moonlight effect which he afterwards destroyed with much energy—a fate that befell much that he did at this time. I noticed that, if left alone, he usually wandered into the vegetable garden and came back with some wonderful colour effect of some otherwise uninteresting cabbage patch or pumpkin bed. It seemed that he was taking the hard road to learn a great lesson—the art of seeing the best in things.

"He was wonderfully boyish and simple, and no one hesitated to criticize his work with the utmost candour. They did not hesitate to tell him, for instance, that he 'couldn't draw for sour apples,' but, nevertheless, each and all advised him to give up the colour and stick to the pen and ink work, and it has always been a solace to my inartistic soul to remember that I backed his colour work from the start, in face of much opposition. It is probable that he influenced me in my choice, however, for he very often talked of some scientist's experiments in testing the colour-sense of monkeys, and other similar subjects dealing with colour, of which he had read and thought a good deal; but it must

be said that, unlike many craftsmen, he never used colours that jarred, and this may have endeared me to his colour work. His favourite colour at this time was blue, and I have a delightful little sketch of Argyle Cut in this colour which he gave me a week or two before he bade good-bye to Callan Park.

"I remember, on one occasion, we were discussing the wonderful sunset effects of Turner, when he remarked that he had read somewhere that towards the end of his life Turner had seen everything yellow. This came back to me forcibly when I noted the great number of studies in yellow at the exhibition of his pictures held in Sydney soon after his death.

"His modesty was almost ridiculous, and when he talked of other artists in Sydney it was always without any assumption of equality. They might, indeed, have been great masters whom he was studying, judging by the way he spoke of them."

Hilder had seen few water-colours of any merit before he came to Sydney. While living in the city he visited the National Gallery several times and found in the English Court a water-colour by R. W. Allan which interested him very much. Of the Australian work, he admired most of all the landscapes of Arthur Streeton, and often said that "Fire's On," "The Cremorne Pastoral," and "Australia Felix" were the first faithful representations of Australian atmosphere. He was also charmed by a painting of mermaids by J. W. Tristram, and the treatment of foliage in some water-colours by Sid Long. There is an air of mystery about the work of these two artists which fascinated him.

About his own sketches he was in a state of great uncertainty. He felt that he had a gift for beautiful arrangements of colour, but he knew that his draughtsmanship was weak and, as a rule, he soon grew dissatisfied with what he had done and destroyed it. He wanted competent advice, but was too diffident to seek it. Fortunately, while at Waverley he met Fred. Leist, the black and white artist, who lived in that suburb. Leist thought Hilder's water-colours were good, but advised him to take them to Julian Ashton who could give him an opinion of more value.

Eventually he mustered up courage and went to Mr. Ashton's studio somewhere in 1906. He gave his name as Joyce, and

produced two water-colours for inspection. In all his long experience Ashton had never met a beginner with so fine a sense of colour. He praised the work warmly, and told the youth that he had the artistic faculty, and ought to go on.

That assurance was a turning point in Hilder's life. He joined Mr. Ashton's classes and began by drawing in charcoal from a cast. The work did not interest him very much, but he knew that his deficiency in drawing had to be made good. For some years he spent much time at the study of drawing, and learned to put down his subject on paper with ease and certainty. As a rule, he made only a faint outline in pencil of the principal features of the selected scene, and laid on the washes of colour directly. In his later years he often made careful outdoor pencil sketches, and made water-colours from them at home.

Some time after he joined the classes he told Ashton that his name was Hilder, and that he had given him a false one because he thought "the Bank would not like to know that any of their staff bothered about art." For the same reason, some of his water-colours of 1905 and thereabouts were signed "Anthony Hood."

Being at the Bank during the day he could not get to the drawing class until late in the afternoon. The classes usually finished at half-past four, but he had permission to continue as long as he liked. Miss Russell, a fellow-student, was also in the habit of working late, sometimes in Hilder's company. She thought him an awkward, overgrown boy; but was impressed by his personality, and eventually won his confidence. He told her that he could not afford to return hospitality, and therefore avoided making friendships and did not accept invitations. She noted his passionate fondness for music, and tells how he used to join Mr. Ashton's class on country sketching trips, coming for the week-end only, when one of the students would play the piano for Hilder, who could repeat whatever he heard accurately from memory.

It was a good while before his shyness wore off, and he came into closer touch with the other students and with Mr. Ashton. The latter took a special interest in the serious, awkward young

Snapshot
Hilder at work

J. J. Hilder in 1909

man, invited him to his house at Bondi, and took him out for walks across the sand-hills—sometimes to make sketches, but more often to chat about art, and colour effects in nature. Julian Ashton was at that time a valuable friend and counsellor to Hilder. Other students shared Ashton's hospitality, and Hilder, meeting them at "Glen View," became more friendly with them—particularly with Sydney Ure Smith and Harry Julius. All liked him and admired his work. They found him appreciative of humour, but very sensitive and ready to take offence.

On one of the country sketching trips he was asked at the end of the day to carry home the bucket in which they cleaned their brushes. Dreamily he gathered his painting gear together, picked up the bucket and walked back. Some of the girls laughed at him, and he fumed inwardly at their irrepressible giggles until the house was reached, when he was greeted with an hilarious roar from the whole company. This made him savage, but when it was pointed out that he had unnecessarily carried back the dirty water, he joined heartily in the laughter.

Hilder had been transferred from Waverley to the head office of the Bank in March, 1906. He had a month's leave in June, and in July went to the William-street branch. Towards the end of the year he was very ill again, and consulted a doctor who told him that he had consumption, and had had it for some time. He took the news bravely, obtained four months' leave, and went to Stanthorpe, Queensland, to undergo treatment and live in the dry, open air. Meanwhile, he applied for appointment to a town in the drier climate west of the Mountains, and in April, 1907, was sent to Wyalong. He felt so ill when going away that he said he would willingly give an arm or a leg to have his chest right again.

Hilder was at Wyalong, in a wretched state of health, in August, 1907, when the Society of Artists' Exhibition was held in Sydney. It was at this exhibition that his water-colours were first shown to the public. Julian Ashton had urged him to send in a number of pictures, and twenty-one were exhibited, one marked at five guineas, and the others at three or four guineas each. They made a sensation amongst the little group of artists and art lovers

of Sydney. The newspapers and the public were appreciative, and all the pictures were sold, excepting two which had been given to friends. Arthur Streeton had just returned from London, and he was enthusiastic about the new artist, emphatically proclaiming him a genius.

Hilder, of course, heard all the good news; but he wrote afterwards to a friend, "my poor little drop of triumph was quite swallowed up in a vast ocean of illness and worry." Once more he had to obtain leave from the considerate Bank, and left Wyalong in September to seek relief in a sanatorium.

Early in 1908 he went to Dumaresq, near Armidale. He had been recommended to stay with Mr. Cory, the school teacher there, one of the inducements being that Mrs. Cory was a trained nurse. Hilder slept in a tent which he put up in a belt of trees at the back of the house, and spent the rest of the day in the open air, either in reading on the verandah, or in walking and sketching in the bush.

At Hilder's earnest request Julian Ashton went up to stay with him at Dumaresq early in the autumn of 1908, obtaining a room at the schoolmaster's house. They went walking and sketching nearly every day; in the evening they were sometimes joined by Mr. Cory, and talked over a wide range of subjects. Ashton says that Hilder was an interesting talker on art and literature. He had given much consideration to the colours he used, and had read whatever he could get on the chemical qualities of pigments, and the experience of other water-colourists in their use. His reading was not extensive, but what he did read was generally good, and always well digested.

During Ashton's stay at Dumaresq the schoolmaster caught a cold, and temporarily lost his voice. Ashton and Hilder offered to carry on the little school, and their offer was accepted. Ashton, despite the difference in years, was as young in spirit as Hilder, and the two artists entered upon their duties with great gusto. They disregarded the prescribed schedule of lessons, Hilder teaching drawing to half the school while Ashton talked to the rest on things in general, heard their reading lessons, or set them subjects for composition. Hilder's method was to draw a saw, hammer,

or other familiar object on the blackboard, ask the children to name it and look at it carefully, then rub it out and make them draw it from memory. This amateur teaching continued for three or four days, and one of its chief interests to Ashton was the evidence it gave of Hilder's affection for children, and the way in which they responded to it.

After Ashton left Dumaresq, Hilder's high-strung nerves were affected by some imaginary slight from his host, and he left in anger. He returned to Sydney, and went to the Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives, at Wentworth Falls, on the Blue Mountains. At the beginning of July, he was sent to the branch of the Bank at Young. He wrote thence that he felt better after the long leave, and that he had gone to two dances—the first for many years. But what little good the holiday did him, he soon lost, and he knew that he could never get well while in a sedentary occupation.

At the Society of Artists' Exhibition in the Spring of 1908, Hilder was represented by fourteen water-colours, all of which were sold. Though fewer in number, they were priced a trifle higher than those shown at the previous exhibition, and brought him almost as large a sum.

Soon after this exhibition he met Miss Phyllis Meadmore, a probationer nurse at Young, the daughter of Mr. Clement Meadmore, of Beecroft, near Sydney. They fell in love at sight. Hilder was thrown into a state of anguish by the conflict between his passionate desire to marry one who seemed to be his destined mate, and his belief that he had no right to ask her to marry a consumptive. He told her that one of the doctors he had consulted gave him only two years to live. Miss Meadmore said she would rather be his wife for two years than live two hundred with anyone else; besides, doctors were frequently wrong, and, with care, he might live many years. So they married at the beginning of 1909, breaking the news to their respective families some time after the event.

Mrs. Hilder strongly urged her husband to leave the Bank and live as much outdoors as possible. The sales at the exhibitions, which had resulted in a net return of something between fifty and

sixty pounds each, seemed to warrant them in believing that he could make a living if he gave his whole time to painting. With a new interest in life and high hopes of the future, Hilder sent in his resignation on the 17th April, and a few days later he was granted nine months' leaving-salary. He was always grateful to the Bank of New South Wales for their considerate treatment throughout his eleven years of service.

As soon as free, Hilder paid a visit to his mother, then ill in Brisbane, while his wife went to her parents at Beecroft. On his return he rented a furnished cottage at Lawson, on the Blue Mountains, where the young couple lived very happily for three months, Hilder painting in the neighbourhood nearly every day. In September they removed to Parramatta, where in the following month their first son was born. They then secured a cottage at Epping, on the highlands north of Parramatta. With much trepidation they spent forty odd pounds—nearly all their capital—on furniture; and with great delight Hilder got the place ready for his wife and baby before the end of October.

This was their first real home, and they entered it with joy and confidence, Hilder being exalted also by his fatherhood. Unfortunately, the Exhibition of the Society of Artists held in November, 1909, proved a great disappointment to him. He had sent in a good many water-colours—the best of his year's work. They all seemed to him much better than his previous exhibits; yet only five were sold, the gross proceeds being twenty-five guineas, from which commission and the cost of framing had to be deducted. With a family on his hands, the prospect seemed very gloomy to the artist, and by the New Year it seemed worse still, for he got a bad attack of pleurisy which laid him up for five weeks.

Salvation came by post in the shape of a cheque from Mr. Albers, the agent to whom had been entrusted the unsold water-colours of the 1909 Exhibition, and from whom he had not heard for some time. A month later another cheque arrived from him. The gloom lifted, and the sun shone out again, for Hilder's health, too, was improving rapidly. By the end of the year Albers had sold water-colours to the gross value of two hundred pounds, and

Hilder felt entitled to buy a pony and trap. Life was now much pleasanter in every way for the little family.

Hilder became much attached to the pony, which, though slow and unreliable, enabled him to explore the many charming by-paths in the neighbourhood, and to take the family with him on sketching expeditions to more distant places between Epping and Hornsby. They had many happy picnics, returning sometimes, on moonlight summer nights, at a late hour. On some of these trips the pony provided some excitement and amusement, for he had a will of his own and objected to late hours.

The year 1911 opened favourably for Hilder so far as health and means were concerned, but the situation soon changed for the worse. There was a falling off in the sale of his work; his funds ran out and housekeeping bills accumulated. On the 27th March the second son was born. With less than two pounds in hand, and a month's accounts owing, they were very despondent, and death seemed preferable to confessing to their relatives that the marriage had been a failure.

However, on the 3rd April a substantial cheque came from Albers, and happiness once more reigned in the house of Hilder. After that there were no more financial crises. His work sold more readily and the price advanced gradually; but he would not offer for sale anything with which he was dissatisfied, and in a good week he seldom completed more than two or three paintings.

Another cottage was taken at Ryde, but it proved unsuitable, and in July, 1912, he moved further north to a cottage a little beyond Hornsby, which he named "Burrator." Here they stayed until October, 1913, when they rented a more comfortable cottage close by called "Inglewood," which remained their home for the rest of Hilder's life.

After his marriage he made several long trips—a fortnight's visit to Richmond in December, 1911; a brief visit to Valley Heights in September, 1912; a month with the family at Berowra Creek, an arm of the Hawkesbury River, in March, 1913; a short stay at Lake Macquarie in August, 1913; and two visits to Dora Creek, which flows into Lake Macquarie, in February and October, 1915, all of which are recorded in his water-colours.

At Lake Macquarie he had an attack of sciatica, a fresh trouble, resulting in insomnia. For a while he suffered so much that it seemed as if he would go out of his mind; fits of exceeding irritability would be followed by periods of moody despondency in which he longed for death. He dreaded being alone for more than a few minutes. The patience and loving care of his wife brought him through this very anxious time, in which her imagination had ample material for creating all sorts of tragic possibilities. He went to a sanatorium, intending to stay for a month; but at the end of a fortnight he told the matron that he must go home, as he could not bear to be any longer away from his wife.

Soon after his return, Hilder arranged with Mr. W. H. Gill for an exhibition of his water-colours in Melbourne, where some had already been sold at different times. The excitement of the preparation, in April, 1914, made him ill; but he enjoyed the voyage to Melbourne very much, for the sea was to him an object of worship. His pictures sold very well, and he met a number of people who were interested in him and said flattering things of his work, and he met a few in whom he was interested.

The trip was a memorable one to Hilder. To Professor (now Sir) Baldwin Spencer, for whom he had a very warm regard, he wrote, in January, 1916: "It is not at all likely that I shall ever come to Melbourne again; but, if I should, it will be a great pleasure to meet you again, sir, and possibly I shall see the Gallery under more favorable conditions. I remember very clearly the Corot, the 'Windmill' of Maris, and Arthur Streeton's 'Thames Barges,' some beautiful old lace, and a winding staircase, which I negotiated in the wake of my guide, and my surprise in finding myself alive at the top of it! I collapsed without ceremony upon a rather grubby-looking old couch, only to find afterwards that it was some invaluable piece of furniture which had been purchased, inter alia, from Hardy Wilson to decorate the place."

The strain of visiting was too much for Hilder, and he was laid up for a fortnight in Melbourne. A week or two after his return he again became ill and suffered terribly. It was found that he had an internal abscess, and an operation was necessary. This was done at Lewisham Private Hospital, where he had three

weeks of agony. For months after his return from hospital any exertion or coughing caused him pain. So severe was his suffering on one occasion that he rushed out of his bath and dashed his head against the trees and the wall of the house, saying that he could bear the pain no longer. Once more the soothing influence of his devoted wife brought him relief; the wound slowly healed, and before the end of the year he was much better.

While at "Inglewood," and just before he went to Melbourne, he discovered the virtues of a clay-pit near his home, and he spent many hours in it every day for weeks, and made many sketches. When the pictures were ready for the Exhibition in Melbourne, Hilder invited the labourers to come over to the house to see them. Fifteen came, and Hilder was quite at ease with them, Mrs. Hilder having been asked previously to disappear so as to avoid embarrassing them. For some time they looked at the water-colours ranged along the wall, but made no comment. Then one broke the silence by calling out: "Why, that's Mike, the 'left-hander,' there with the pick." Then some of the others asked questions, such as: "What's the object?" "What are yer doin' it for, Mister," and the like. The invitation had been dictated by a fine courtesy, as an acknowledgment of their having left him alone while sketching amongst them; but Hilder was disappointed at their lack of appreciation of his art.

There were lengthy periods at "Inglewood" when Hilder was comparatively free from pain and able to work well. He was improving steadily in the use of his medium—and in his own opinion the value of his work before 1909 was as nothing to that which he did in the happier conditions that followed his marriage.

A typical day in his life at this time began at six o'clock or thereabouts, when the two children came to his bed in a corner of the verandah. The three would play while Mrs. Hilder made ready the morning tea. Half-an-hour later Hilder would shave, bathe and dress; his usual costume being a white canvas shirt open at the throat, old trousers and a white linen or panama hat, with canvas shoes, into which he thrust his bare feet only when he went out. The family breakfasted under the trees; after

which he read the newspaper until half-past nine or ten, and then, if they were not going on a distant expedition with the pony and trap, he would walk off with the children to sketch. They never interfered with him while at work. He came back in time to get the first couple of washes in before lunch, and was unable to resume until he had rested for an hour or so after the meal. While painting he was utterly absorbed in his work. He disliked to have anyone, even his wife, look at the picture until finished. Then he would invite the family to a private view, and was greatly interested in the children's attitude towards it. He tore up a great many of his water-colours, and for some years it was the third or even fourth effort to realize his vision that went out for sale. He could not work without his pipe, though he smoked more matches than tobacco, and his wife knew when a picture was completed to his satisfaction by his sitting gazing at it, and puffing at his pipe, for some time before the evening meal began. In the evening he would read and talk with his wife. They seldom went out, and found sufficient pleasure in each other's company not to miss theatres and other amusements. Almost from the start, his disease had prevented him from taking athletic exercise of any kind. Even walking trips for sketching purposes had to be abandoned in the last few years.

Dora Creek was the best of all his sketching grounds. He delighted in its every turn, its leaning trees reflected in clear water, and its busy fishing boats. In May, 1915, between the first and the second visits, he had a bad attack of his permanent malady, and was quite unable to work again until August. When he recovered he was keenly delighted to find that his hand had not lost its cunning, and the family returned to the Creek as quickly as possible. In that last visit he made some of his finest water-colours, and many pencil sketches which he afterwards used. He was, however, steadily getting weaker, and could not walk or work for half-an-hour without exhaustion. After the breakdown in May, he gave up the hope of permanent recovery which he had nourished through years of intermittent attacks; but he spared neither pains nor expense to prolong his life so that he might earn more money. He grudged expenditure

on anything else, and did without the little luxuries he might otherwise have sought, so that after he had gone the slender provision he was making for his loved ones might be as large as possible.

When one looks at these later drawings, with their exquisitely delicate colour harmonies, and filled with the romance of place, one gets a suggestion of the peace that has fallen there like a blessing from Heaven. They are landscapes in which pure beauty seems to reign undisturbed by the turmoil and anguish of the lives of mortals. Those dulcet harmonies of tone were created in pain. Shelley said of artists in another medium: "They learn in suffering what they teach in song"; so with Hilder, the beauty which men find in his work was bought with blood and tears.

The Dora Creek landscapes were made after his visit to Melbourne, where he saw Corot's "The Bent Tree," which gave him the deepest pleasure he ever derived from the sight of any work of art. He found that Corot had achieved all that he himself had desired to accomplish in suggesting the soul of a place, but he was already on the same path as the great Frenchman, and, in all probability, if he had never seen "The Bent Tree," his later course would have been much the same. I say this after comparing carefully the pictures he made before the visit to Melbourne with those made after it.

Though modest, Hilder was sincere about his own work as about other things; he believed that it was good, and would bear comparison with the examples of modern English water-colour he had seen—mostly, it is true, in reproduction. He was just winning public appreciation when he died, but he had not been without recognition of a very encouraging kind. An article on his work by Mr. D. H. Souter had appeared in "Art and Architecture," 1909, and the newspaper notices of any pictures he exhibited were generally eulogistic. The larger part of his work after 1910 was sold privately, and sold more readily every year. Certainly the prices were in proportion to size, and the small water-colours, about 10 x 8 inches, which are amongst his best, did not bring more than six or eight guineas as a rule.

Hilder's conscience was imperious, and allowed no truckling to the market. He painted to please himself in the first instance, and never sent to his agent anything which did not come up to his own exacting standard. The Trustees of the New South Wales National Gallery bought the large "Dry Lagoon" for fifty guineas in 1912, and, later on, requested him to submit others. He painted for them the monotone "At Close of Day," which, however, was not sent to the Gallery until after the artist's death.

Towards the end, when Hilder knew that he had no hope of seeing the water-colours of Cotman, Turner, De Wint, and others of which he had read, he doubted whether his work would endure as theirs had done, and at times he fell into despondent moods about its relative value. It was in some such mood that his friend, Mr. W. Hardy Wilson, found him when he called at "Inglewood" one day in 1916. Hilder valued the criticism of Hardy Wilson, an architect and fellow-artist of unquestioned good taste, who had a considerable knowledge of the world's best art. Hilder showed him his latest work, which seemed to the visitor the best he had done. Wilson spoke of one detail and another, and then said with sincerity and conviction: "There's not the slightest doubt, Hilder, you'll live in these water-colours; they're great." The dying man turned away with tears in his eyes, and, one may imagine, joy in his heart.

Besides Mr. Wilson, Miss Russell was almost the only one of Hilder's friends who visited him during the last year. He did not encourage anyone to call, as he wished to avoid even the mere suspicion of pity. It happened, too, that he had fallen out with a number of his friends—Dr. Moffitt, Julian Ashton, Sydney Smith, Harry Julius and myself—for what seemed insufficient reasons to each of us. I feel very sorry now that I did not understand his temperament better, for, had I understood, I should have made due allowance for it, as well as for the excessive irritability caused by his ill-health. He was too proud to make any overtures towards a reconciliation except in the case of Julian Ashton, to whom he felt he owed so much, and whom he asked to call when he knew the end was not far off.

JESSE JEWHURST HILDER

I first met him in 1910 at a meeting of the Casual Club, where it chanced that I sat alongside him and entered into a conversation which attracted me to him. He had strong brown eyes, a deep voice, and a dignified manner; he talked as one who regarded life and art seriously, and gave me the impression of blunt sincerity and a rather austere habit of mind. As we lived in the same neighbourhood, I saw him fairly often afterwards, when our talks were mostly about books. He was not widely read, but he had reflected much over the books he liked. He greatly admired Keats and Rossetti, and amongst Australian poets he preferred Hugh McCrae and Roderic Quinn. His keenest delight was in a few prose writers—Borrow, for whom he felt something a little this side of idolatry, Walter Scott and Joseph Conrad. All of Borrow and "The Heart of Midlothian," Mrs. Hilder tells me, he read over and over again. Carlyle he read discriminatingly, and got a good deal of sustenance from him. Of current fiction he found most pleasure in the early romances of Hewlett, Galsworthy's novels, Whiteing's "No. 5 John Street" and "The Island," and Stackpoole's "Blue Lagoon." One story that interested him was Arnold Bennett's "Buried Alive," because he saw in the principal character an artist very much like what he imagined himself to be. He asked his wife not to read it, "as it shows me up too much, and you would not have any respect for me afterwards." Gilbert Murray's translations of Euripides, and of "The Frogs" of Aristophanes interested him deeply, as they made the Greeks appear quite modern; and he found consolation in the "Enchiridion" of Epictetus during his last year or so.

His last picture was painted on the 23rd March, 1916. Soon after he knew that the end was coming, his cough becoming almost incessant. On Sunday, the 9th April, it rained all day, and the children, who had been sent to a kindergarten at Beecroft for fear they should disturb their father, did not come up to "Inglewood" for the week-end as usual. The absence of his two boys upset Hilder, and all day he grew steadily worse. At midnight Mrs. Hilder gave him sulphonal to induce sleep; she

herself, worn out by anxiety and long hours of nursing, dozed for a little while and awoke with a fright early on Monday morning, the 10th April, to find her husband dying. He had strength for one last caress, and then fell back, still. Outside, the storm had reached its height, and the vivid lightning was flashing into the verandah where the stricken widow lay with the body that had held the fine, proud soul of Jesse Jewhurst Hilder.

Y COUNTRY

A Poem

by Dorothea Mac-
-kellar with decorations
and illustrations by
J·J·Hilder

Sydney · 1915 ·

MY COUNTRY

A · Poem · by Dorothea · Mackellar · with decorations and illustrations by J · J · Hilder · Sydney 1915 · · ·

The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins;
Strong love of grey-blue distance,
Brown streams and soft dim skies.
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains;
I love her far horizons
I love her jewel-sea
Her beauty and her terror —
The wide brown land for me!

The tragic ringbarked forests
Stark white beneath the moon.
The sapphire misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree tops
And ferns the crimson soil.

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky.
When sick at heart around us
We see the cattle die —
But then the grey clouds gather
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army.
The steady soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the Rainbow Gold,
For flood and fire and famine
She pays us back threefold
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful lavish land —
All you who have not loved her
You will not understand —
Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.

RECOLLECTIONS OF HILDER

BY HARRY JULIUS

SYDNEY URE SMITH and I were members of Julian Ashton's classes in 1906 when Hilder joined. He was shy and reserved, so it was a good while before we got to know him. As he drew in charcoal from the plaster cast, we had no inkling of his quality as a colourist for some time. When we did see one of his brilliant little landscapes, we were so enthusiastic and so anxious to see more of his work, that he asked the two of us to visit him at his lodgings on Bellevue Hill and look through all his sketches.

That first evening at Hilder's was a rare one for us. He pulled a box from under the table in his bedroom, and took out a number of small water-colours. We hailed each of them with delight as he stood them up on the table, for the brilliance and promise of his work surprised us. Hilder enjoyed our appreciation of his paintings, but when he came across one that did not satisfy him, our groans did not save it from destruction. Each of us took away a sketch he chose from what was left of the bundle.

Later on, he gave me a beautiful greenish-blue moonlight study. After having parted with the painting, he became dissatisfied with it and wanted to tear it up. However, I got it safely to my studio, and intended to send it to the framers next day. Before that could be done, Hilder called in, and finding the offending water-colour on my bookcase and no one looking on, he quietly destroyed it. Again, some time afterwards, he acted in almost the same way. It was not only that he was a severe critic of his work, but at that time he seemed to have moods of extreme dissatisfaction with everything he did.

Hilder was a frequent visitor at the studios which Syd. Smith and I shared. Although he was passionately fond of fresh air, the thick atmosphere of our first room after a night's boxing and smoking, or the lingering odour of the Domain dosser who had been posing for us, did not prevent him from dropping in to talk

art. Each time we changed our quarters, the rooms became more business-like. Hilder did not approve of this, and it pained him to see us eventually located in a spick and span modern office.

He was fond of walking, and we asked him to join us for a few days' sketching trip from Penrith out to Mulgoa. Hilder was not enthusiastic about sleeping on the hard ground, nor did he bear patiently the soothing lullaby of the mosquitoes, but in the daytime he clumped along in fine style in the heavy boots he generally wore, and seemed to enjoy himself.

It was during that trip that I saw him at work for the first time. A drizzle had set in, and we took shelter in a deserted barn. From the doorway Hilder made a delightful note of the pearly grey landscape. I was interested in watching his deftness in selecting all that was beautiful in the scene and eliminating the commonplaces.

His interest in colour was very great, and he became particularly fond of smalt on account of its granulation when applied to paper. It was an expensive colour and difficult to get then as there was very little demand for it; Hilder was always on the hunt for it when in town, and was in great glee when he managed to secure a few cakes at an out-of-the-way shop.

Once he gave me a list of the colours he used, but I have lost it. Mrs. Hilder, however, on looking over his stock of colours found that he had been using these:—Light Red, Venetian Red, Rose Madder, Burnt Umber, Vermilion, Burnt Sienna, Neutral Orange, Aureolin, Cadmium Yellow, Lemon Yellow, Indian Yellow, Yellow Ochre, French Blue, Cobalt Blue, Cerulean Blue, Smalt, Ultramarine, Chinese White.

Hilder made three or four oil paintings, but he seldom used any other medium than water-colour. I showed him a simple method of making monotypes, and for a time he was absorbed in it. The process was that of painting in oils on a piece of glass, placing a sheet of damp blotting-paper on the painting and then rolling a bottle over the paper to get an impression. It is a tricky method, and amused him for a while. His reason for abandoning oil painting was that the smell of the materials made him ill.

During the time Hilder lived between Strathfield and Hornsby,

he often walked long distances to the places where he wished to paint. Eventually the exercise became too trying for him, so he bought a pony and trap. I am not sure whether Hilder bought the trap and had the pony thrown in, or received the vehicle as a bonus for taking the pony off somebody's hands. Anyhow, "Pone," as Hilder called him, was a cunning veteran with a fixed antipathy to speed. He suited his master very well as he had an uncanny artistic sense. He slowed down when a good colourful composition attracted Hilder's attention, and stopped dead without being asked when the artist became absorbed in the landscape.

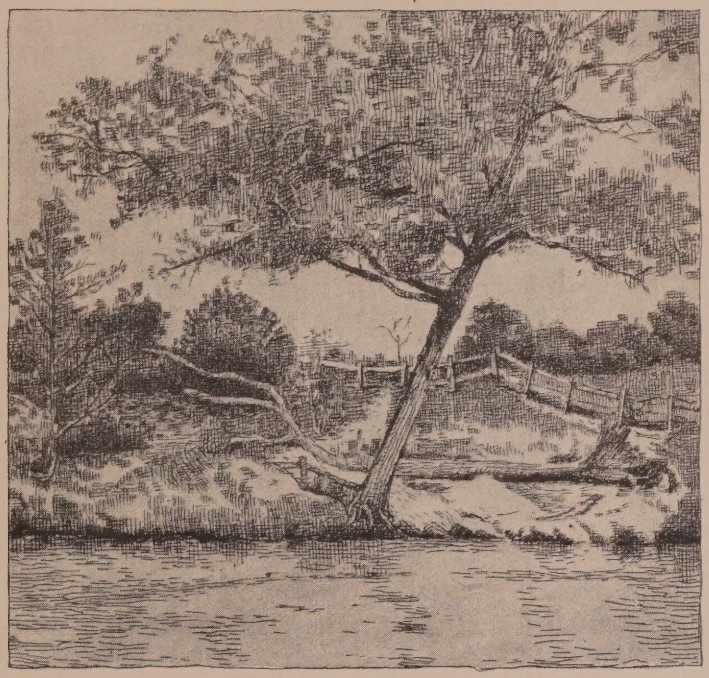
When making for home one afternoon Hilder caught sight of a vista with possibilities in it and turned to gaze as he passed it, at the same time directing Pone by flicks of the reins. So charmed was he by the view that he forgot everything else, until suddenly he discovered that Pone had halted after taking him up the pathway to the front verandah of a large house where a number of strangers were gazing at him in amazement over their afternoon tea cups.

On one occasion Hilder, Syd. Smith and I, with lunch basket and sketching gear, squeezed into the little sulky in order to go from Hornsby to the Kuring-gai Chase. Hilder wanted to explore a little off the main road and steered the trap into difficult places searching for subjects. He displayed unreasonable irritation with Pone if the sulky balanced too long on one wheel or a bent sapling lashed back into our faces. We were well on our way when part of the harness broke and Pone, under the stress of the unexpected, actually tried to bolt! Hilder stuck to him and though Syd. was thrown out, no other damage was done.

Hilder was very fond of old Pone, who added a good deal to the happiness of the latter part of his life. In fact, he was in love with all animals. A couple of stray cats knew this and took up their abode with him. He hadn't the heart to say them nay, nor to take drastic action when their family increased. Soon the place became overrun. I counted over a dozen one day, and we wondered how long it would be before the growing family drove Hilder and his family out of the house.

Through a trivial misunderstanding our visits to Hilder ended abruptly about a year before his death. Standing with the small group of his friends at his graveside, I was troubled that his illness, not himself, should have trampled on our friendship, and it made the end more bitter. At the memorial exhibition of his work three months later, many familiar water-colours revived incidents in his friendship with Syd. Smith and myself, as we saw most of his work either at his home or on his occasional visits to town, when he generally brought his latest batch of paintings to show us.

As well as a love of beauty, he had a sense of humour all his own and described a humorous incident in a quaintly dignified manner that always brought laughter. On looking at the reproductions for this book I realise more than ever the loss of his honest and vivid personality. He was as fine a friend as he was a painter.

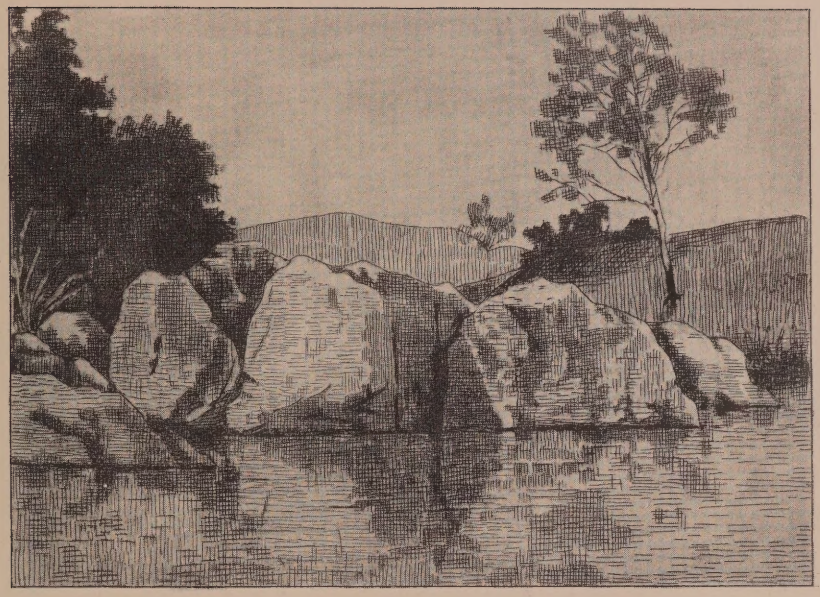


PEN AND PENCIL DRAWINGS

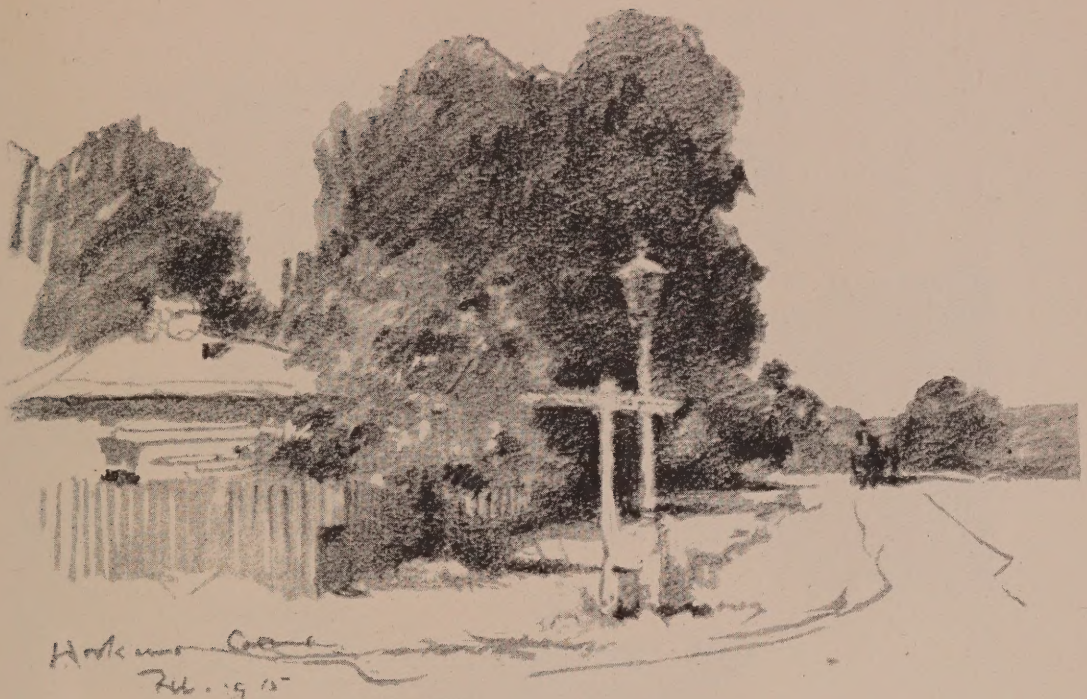
The Pool
Pen Drawing
after painting
by A. D. Peppercorn

Pixy-Led
Pen Drawing
after painting
by Fred Hall

The Sisters
Pen Drawing
after painting
by Ribot

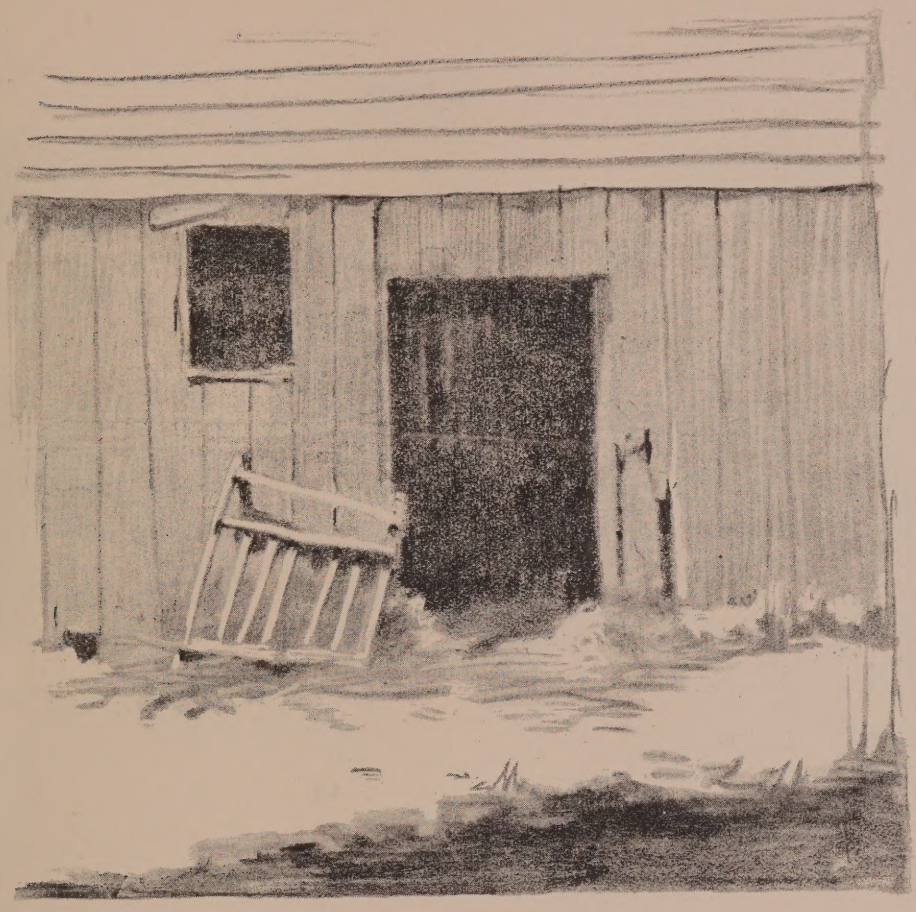


River Bank, Bega
Pen Drawing
in the possession of
Mrs. Arthur Wren, Bega



Hookham's Corner, Hornsby
Pencil Sketch
in the possession of
Mrs. J. J. Hilder

Dora Creek
Pencil Sketch
in the possession of
Mrs. J. J. Hilder

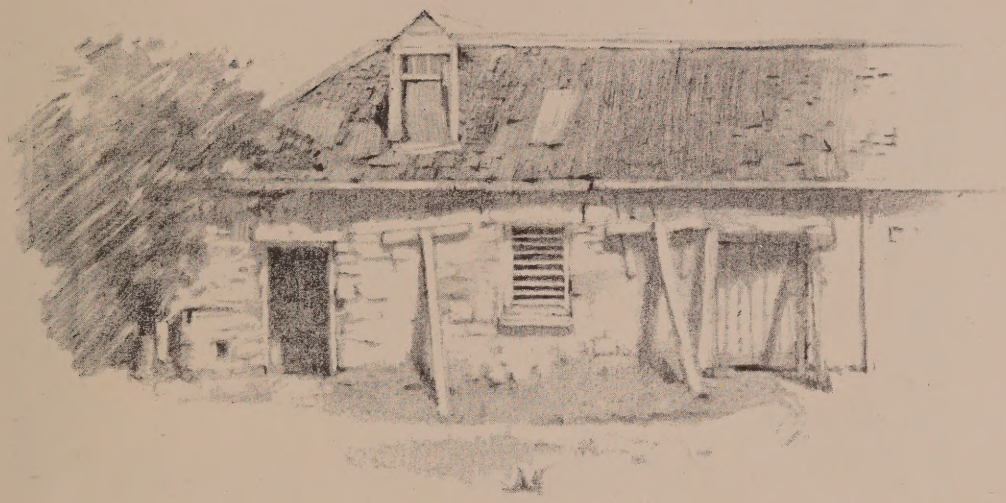


The Stable (the home of Hilder's Pony)
Drawn while living at
" Burrator," Hornsby

Brickmakers
Pencil Drawing

The Fisherman's Cottage
Pencil Drawing

The Shelter Shed
Pencil Drawing



Old Stables, Ryde
Pencil Drawing

Old Cottage, Ryde
Pencil Drawing

The Boathouse
Pencil Drawing

Chinamen's Garden, Woollahra
Pen Drawing in sepia
in the possession of
S. Ure Smith

Bookplate
for Miss Cherrie Newton
Pen Drawing

MEMORIES OF HILDER

BY SYDNEY URE SMITH

WHEN I first met Hilder at Julian Ashton's classes he was working at a Bank in William Street, Sydney, and living in a boarding-house at Bellevue Hill. It was some time before we became friends, for Hilder's manner was very reserved and he seemed to wish to avoid his fellow-students. However, his reserve broke down eventually, and he invited Julius and myself to his diggings. It was a small room, with a balcony which overlooked the Harbour. Everything in it was very neatly arranged. I soon learned that Hilder cherished all his humble belongings, and that every little thing he possessed had a special value because it was his own. His books, for instance, were not numerous, but they were good; and he had adorned each of them with an original design for a bookplate.

We often talked about books, and I remember that he was much impressed by the poetry of Blake and greatly admired George Borrow. He was keen also on Maurice Hewlett's novels and De Maupassant's "Afloat." "Jude the Obscure" was under discussion on one occasion, and he said Hardy was too realistic for his taste—he dwelt too long on sordid details.

Hilder showed me an interesting collection of black and white drawings, culled from many sources, and a book containing Millais' illustrations to the Parables, which he liked. He had, also, a little collection of pen and ink drawings made by himself when a boy from half-tone reproductions of Royal Academy pictures. In translating them into line he had added a beauty all his own.

I saw quite a lot of Hilder while he was at Ashton's. In appearance he was tall and dark. There was something aristocratic and proud about him. Ashton once said—"To see Hilder tramping across the sandhills at Rose Bay, with his sketching gear, one would think he was at least a duke."

Hilder had a slight stoop, and a friend once mentioned it,

saying to him: "Look here, Hilder, why don't you stick your chest out, and hold your head up like a man?"

"I tried it once," replied Hilder, gruffly, "but I felt such an awful bounder that I never did it again!"

I was a frequent visitor at his compact little room on Bellevue Hill. It was there I first saw his water-colours, and it was there, too, that I heard the painful news of his illness. A succession of colds had led to medical treatment, and it was not long before his doctor made the fateful discovery. Up to that time his health had always seemed to be good, and it was a tremendous blow to him when he discovered how serious the trouble was. However, he took the news bravely, and prepared to face the fight for existence courageously. The Bank transferred him to Wyalong, where the climate was considered more suitable.

At first we corresponded more or less regularly, and then, as is inevitable, there were longer intervals between our letters. I next heard of him when his marriage with Miss Phyllis Meadmore was announced, and he afterwards wrote and told me that he had settled down in a little cottage at Lawson. His marriage made all the difference in his attitude to life and to his work. Before marrying he was fretful and depressed; life held no charm for him. But he had been fortunate indeed in his choice of a helpmate. Mrs. Hilder faced the precarious future with a cheerful and trusting spirit, which must have made him feel a different man. And I shall never forget the happiness that radiated from the letter he wrote telling me of the birth of his first son.

When Blamire Young's exhibition of water-colours was held in Sydney, Hilder came down from Hornsby to see it. The show had not been successful till a characteristic letter from Julian Ashton appeared in the daily press pointing out Blamire Young's qualities as a water-colourist. After that, Young's work was rushed, and the show ended by being the most successful held in Sydney for a long time. Hilder met Julius and myself at the exhibition, and, for some reason not known to us, he was extremely irritable. He affected a Norfolk suit with knickerbockers at the time, and as his stockinged legs were rather thin, it is more than possible that some youth in the street had loudly remarked

the fact. He looked at some of the water-colours, and one we were enthusiastic about, called "The Critics," he examined carefully for a long time. It was a typical Blamire Young, its success and charm depending on its excellent colour arrangement. It was loose in drawing and handling, and its title was really quite unimportant.

"What is it?" said Hilder. "What's it all about?"

"Surely, that doesn't matter—especially to you?" I suggested.

"I'll ask Young about it," he said, and forthwith tramped over to him and said: "Mr. Young, would you explain what this water-colour is all about?"

Young looked quite abashed for a moment. However, he stammered out: "Certainly!" and then gravely discoursed, at great length, on the idea of the picture. As an idea it was quite uninteresting, and it is quite possible that Young made up his elaborate story on the spot. But it evidently satisfied Hilder, for when he had finished Hilder said in that quaint, abrupt manner of his, "Thanks!" After that Hilder felt better. I fancy Blamire Young had received the benefit of Hilder's pent up feelings against the rude youth in the street.

Before we left the room, Hilder discovered a number of water-colours that appealed to him, and one in particular moved him to go and congratulate Young. Young then said many complimentary things about Hilder's water-colours and urged him to work for an exhibition in Melbourne, which Hilder would not readily consent to do. Young afterwards offered to help in arranging to show some of them in London, but Hilder was unable to accept.

After leaving Young's pictures, we had different ideas as to where we should lunch, and the discussion ended in Hilder suddenly leaving us and stalking down George Street in a state of high dudgeon. Little things annoyed him tremendously. Once he sent in a picture by carrier to our studio. He came in to receive it personally, and because it didn't arrive to time, his rage reached white heat. He abused the unfortunate carrier, while pacing our room, for quite ten minutes, and finally worked us up into the same nervous state as himself.

He was a staunch comrade and would hear nothing that belittled a friend's character. At a Society of Artists' Exhibition, there was a curious short-sighted individual peering into the pictures with his face pressed closely against the glass. Ashton was there, and said to Hilder:

"Who *is* that chap?"

"It's so and so," said Hilder, mentioning the man's name.

"Damned old ass!" from Ashton.

"He's *not* an ass, and he's a friend of mine!" replied Hilder, scornfully. There was an awkward pause, but Ashton, who knew his Hilder, did not carry the discussion further.

I often had the pleasure of accompanying Hilder on sketching tours. The simplest subject attracted him, and he instinctively avoided the obvious and commonplace. It was interesting to see how he seized the essentials and centred his interest thereon. He was fastidious about his composition. The exact placing of every object in his picture was always carefully considered before he began his drawing. His pencil drawings on the water-colour board were not carried far, being only a suggestion of outline. He generally flooded a warm wash of aureolin or yellow ochre over his board as a beginning.

One has only to think of the Australian water-colours produced before Hilder's time to realize what a revolution in outlook he has brought about. So many of them were pink and thin in tone values. Hilder's early work was notable for its rich tones and brilliant colour. His water-colours had the richness of oils; he broke away from the prettiness that was then common, and produced exquisite gems of colour that were always robust and full.

His work changed considerably in character as he progressed. From brilliant colour he went almost to monotones. I think the large "Moreton Bay," "The Island Trader," and "The Beacon," represent his high-water mark in the use of strong colour. "The Deviation" is, I think, one of the finest, representing a combination of light and colour. His "Clay Pit" series contains many beautiful examples. For sheer romantic beauty and reserve of colour, "The Old Cottage—Ryde" will always be a great favourite of mine, and the monotones, "Distant City" and "Grey

" Inglewood "
Drawing by Lloyd Rees

Landscape," are perfect examples of his art. But all the "Dora Creek" set, which represented the last phase of his art, are so full of beauty that it becomes almost impossible to select.

There are some people who think that much of Hilder's work is slight; but I consider that even his early water-colours always carried a sense of completeness with them. In the work of his many imitators one will find slightness. They have seen in Hilder's work what they thought an easy way out of difficulties; but Hilder's technique has eluded them, and it always will. There is an austerity about a Hilder water-colour that gives it a quality all his own. His compositions are never strained; his handling never affected. He had no desire to parade his cleverness, and he never descended to common tricks and mannerisms.

His is the work of a refined and cultured mind. He felt beauty keenly, and his work reflected a sensitive outlook on nature. The sincerity of the man is stamped on his work; it is never artificial. His taste was irreproachable, as witness "My Country," by Dorothea Mackellar, illustrated and hand-lettered throughout by him. How excellently the little water-colours are placed in the space! What a sense of balance there is on every page! He did two other books in a similar style—"The Lotus Flower," a poem by Roderic Quinn, illustrated with exquisite water-colours of Sydney Harbour, and "A Pastoral," by Essex Evans. The wonderful thing about these tiny pictures is that, although so small, they have the breadth and vigour of large paintings.

The observation of edges and the handling of them is one of the most important points in water-colour painting, and it was in this that Hilder excelled. The soft edge of a tree against the sky, the melting of a sky into distance—Hilder managed these difficult problems in a masterly way. As he progressed, his technique became more and more elusive, as all good technique should. There is seldom any sign of effort in his work; his vision simply flowed on to the paper. He was careful in selecting the drawings he offered to the public, and was a severe and ruthless critic of his own work.

THE ART OF J. J. HILDER

The work of creative artists is of far greater importance to a nation than is generally imagined, for it is the best indication of the height to which its people have attained. I feel sure that the water-colours of J. J. Hilder will be regarded as amongst the finest expressions of the soul of Australia.

LIST OF PAINTINGS BY J. J. HILDER

Hilder made a note of the paintings he sent out for exhibition or private sale. His list is printed here. The dates are those on which the drawings left the artist, and approximate to the time of completion. In addition, the titles are given of the water-colours presented to his wife and those left unsold at his death.

1907 Moreton Bay
Coogee
Seascape
The Bridge
The Road
Bondi
Bellevue Hill
A Sketching Party
Kincumber
Cloud Effect
Grey Day
The Pool
Narrabeen
Nocturne
A Cloudy Day
Lagoon
Bondi
Callan Park
Bathers, Coogee

1908 Bellevue Hill
The Willows
Landscape
The Sandhills
Moreton Bay
Street in a Northern Town
A Farm Kitchen
Garden Reach
Ti-Trees
New England
Near Guyra
Cabbage Tree Creek

1908 The Plain
Study of a Tree

1909 The Plough
An Old Slaughter House
Lennox Bridge, Parramatta
The Avenue, Lawson
A Winter Morning
Landscape

1910

Feb. A Curve in the Track
Ploughing
The Gully—Woollahra
Lawson
Nundah
Kedron
Landscape—Trees and Cows
Parramatta Bridge
The Bridge—Ryde
Garden Reach, Brisbane River
Moreton Bay

Mar. The Pool
Garden Reach, Brisbane River
Katoomba
The Compleat Angler
House at Ryde
Parramatta Park
Frog Hollow

1910

June Old House at Ryde
Ploughing

July Dredging Country
Children on the Beach
Willows
An Epping Byway
Ploughing
The Pool
Ten Minutes Sketch of Mr. C. Meadmore
Study of Fancy Costume
Ploughing

Aug. The Bathers
Ploughing

Sept. Ryde Bridge
Ploughing

Oct. Morning on the Parramatta River
The Lake
The Blue Mountains
The Dell

Nov. Twilight
An Old Cottage
Ploughing
The Old Bridge
Nocturne

Dec. The Old Horse

1911

Jan. St. Mary's Cathedral
Moreton Island
Ploughing
The Cross Roads

Mar. Farm Scene
Mangroves
The Bridge
The White Bridge
Nocturne

1911

Apl. Timber Getters
A Northern Road

May Nocturne
On the Hawkesbury
Mangroves

June The Drovers
Landscape with Goats
Ploughing
An Old Goat
An Old Road

July Washing Day
Harbour Sketch
Frosty Morning, Homebush
Harbour Sketch
Landscape (Willows)
Landscape
Decorative Panel for Mr. Justice Ferguson
Twilight Landscape

Aug. Landscape—Grey Day at Rhodes

Sept. A Northern Road
The Lagoon
Harbour Sketch
Landscape
A Street in Paddington

Oct. Landscape—Evening
Cypresses
Summer Twilight

Nov. Parramatta from the River
Berowra Creek
Ploughing
Bush Flowers

LIST OF PAINTINGS

1911

Dec. The Marsh
Harbour Sketch
The Brickworks

1912

Jan. The Bridge
Early Morning on the River

Feb. South Kurrajong
Windsor from Richmond
A Country Road
The Lagoon's Edge
Ryde Bridge
Boys with a Parrot

Mar. A Country Post Office
A Country Road, Ryde
Landscape

Apl. Cowan Creek
Berowra Creek
Berowra Creek
A Dry Watercourse

May The Stable of the Currency Lass
The Quarry

June While the Billy Boils
The Manly Boat
Ferry Road
Grey Landscape
Ferry Road
The Brickmakers
Old Cottage, Ryde

July Landscape with Sheep
Ryde Bridge
Approaching Evening
Landscape with Sheep

1912

Aug. Nocturne
A Roadside Sketch
Foley's Bay
The Timber Getters
The Boatshed, Foley's Bay

Sept. The Drovers
Landscape

Oct. The Signal Box
Harbour Sketch
Harbour Sketch
Woolley's Dock

Nov. Landscape
Old Steps at Manly
Shepherd's Bush (oil)
Park Gates, Parramatta
Foley's Bay (oil)

Dec. Reflections (oil)
Harbour Note
The Shelter Shed
The She-Oak
The G. P. O.
Monotype—The Argyle Cut
Old Cottage, Ryde
The Dry Lagoon

1913

Jan. Old Cottage, Ryde
The Bay
Old Kitchen, Ryde

Feb. Boathouse, Foley's Bay

Mar. The Lone Hand
A Bush Track
The Ringbarked Tree
Still Waters

1913

Mar. Morning
Cloud Shadows on the Hill (oil)
The Stable Door
A Bush Track (large)
Little Cyprean

Apl. The Horse Power
Twilight
Twilight
Wiseman's Ferry

May Golden Eve

June At Watson's Bay
Rain on the Mountains
Landscape with Cows
The Argyle Cut
Toronto

July The Ferry
Landscape with Sheep
The Cutting (Deviation)

Sept. Landscape Study
Afterglow
Western Skies
The White Bridge
Landscape—Bay Road
Landscape—Bay Road
Sketch—Bay Road

Oct. Brickmakers
A Mountain Hillside
Landscape—Grey Pastures
Cottage with wistaria

Nov. A Selector's Hut
A Boiling-Down House
Evening

1914

Jan. The Ducks' Paddock

1914

Feb. Twilight
Grey Landscape
Hawkesbury Boat
Brick Kiln
The Clay Pit
Old Shed

Mar. Hazelbrook (oil)
The Clay Pit
A Country Road
Railway Bridge (Stokes')
The Clay Pit

Apl. Large Landscape
The Sliprails
Selector's Camp

May The Silent Hour
A Bush Road
Grey Landscape
The Hillside
Rain on the Hills
Children Bathing
A Little Bridge
The White Bridge
A Brick Kiln
The Bridge
Clouds and Sea
A Turn in the Road
Morning
Summer Afternoon
A Country Post Office
The Clay Pit
Boiling the Billy
Patsey
Pumping Water
Children Paddling
Ti-Tree Creek
The Plough
Still Water

LIST OF PAINTINGS

1914

May The Ringbarked Tree
Road and Rail

June Little Landscape
Twilight
Small Cutting
Government House, Windsor
Wharf Lights
Suburban Landscape
Roadmakers
Excavating
Drilling
A Wheeler
Brickmakers
Rain on the Harbour
Twilight
Grey Clay

July The Tunnel
Sunday
From the Heights
The Boathouse
The Stable
Little Landscape
The Underworld
Evening
The Far Blue Hills
Ploughing (small)
Brick Kiln
Bush Flowers

Aug. Grey Landscape
Grey Landscape with Sheep
Golden Landscape
Mike
Western Skies
The Distant Town

1914

Sept. Harry
The Bay
Filling the Truck
Hillsides
Brisbane River
Deviation Works
The Fields
Two Pastorals
Evening

Oct. The Old Horse Drinking
Stokes' Bridge
Coaling
Mosman

Nov. Harbour Foreshores
Ploughman

Dec. The Pool
Edge of the Bush
The Garden
Lennox Bridge
Moreton Bay

1915

Jan. The Little Bridge
Morning Ride
Landscape, Hornsby
The Bathers

Feb. Landscape, Evening
Evening Glow
Evening

Mar. Moreton Bay
The Footbridge
Galston Road
Grey Landscape

Apl. Clay Pit
Dora Creek (large)
Dora Creek
Dora Creek

1915
May Morning in Kuring-gai Chase
Dora Creek
Dora Creek (large)
Landscape
Travelling Sheep
Dora Creek Sketches
June Evening
Dora Creek
Moreton Bay
Dora Creek
Landscape (oil)
July Trees and Mist
Landscape (oil)
Aug. Circular Quay
Sept. Six Water-colours for Decorative Panel
Bush Road
Moreton Bay
Evening, with Sheep
The Waterhole
Dora Creek
Oct. The Beach

1915
Oct. Grey Day, Dora Creek
Cloudy Day, Dora Creek
Old Cottage, Bay Road
Nov. Bush Fire Smoke
Brickmakers, "The Quarry"
Cottages, Mosman
Dec. The Kurrajong
1916
Jan. Landscape
Apl. Dora Creek
Dora Creek
Dora Creek
Moreton Bay
Dora Creek
Dora Creek
Dora Creek
The Plough
Fisherman's Cottage
Moreton Bay
Mosman
The Close of Day

"My Country." Book of Six Water-colours, and poem by Dorothea Mackellar, hand-lettered.
"The Lotus Flower." Book of Thirteen Water-colours, and poem by Roderic Quinn, hand-lettered.
"A Pastoral." Book of Eight Water-colours, and poem by Geo. Essex Evans, hand-lettered.

LIST OF PAINTINGS

In the possession of the Trustees of the Hilder Estate

Compleat Anglers
Deviation Work
Three Barrows
Landscape
Fog Lifting on Lake Macquarie
Building the Wall
Bay Road
Harbour Note
Motor Launches at Anchor
The Old Boatman
St. Mary's Cathedral
A Morning Ride
Horse and Dray at Clay Pit
Evening Light
Excavation, Bay Road
A Bush Track
A Sunlit Hill, Hawkesbury (oil)
Galston Road (oil)
A Country Road
Through the Trees
Grey Landscape, Hazelbrook
Dora Creek
Children Paddling
Berowra
Dora Creek
Dora Creek, Moored Boat
Landscape
Landscape
Dora Creek
Pastoral
Landscape
Dora Creek

LIST OF PAINTINGS

In the possession of Mrs. J. J. Hilder

Danae Found by Fishermen (First water-colour)
Chinese God of Wisdom (water-colour)
Chinese God of Wisdom (oil)
Study of Children in Garden
Vernon Hilder
A Ringbarked Tree (duplicate)
Children Paddling (duplicate)
Sailing by Moonlight
Katoomba
Sunset Clouds
Hornsby Valley
Garden Reach—Brisbane River
Old Cottage—Ryde (monotype)
Woolley's Slips (duplicate)
The Bottom of the Pit (duplicate)
The Clay Pit
Motor Boats at Anchor—Foley's Bay (duplicate)
Building the Wall (duplicate)
Old Cottage—Ryde (large)
Little Coogee
Old Gum Trees
Boat House—Dora Creek
Argyle Cut
Mr. Begge
The Painter
Study of Excavation Workers
Excavation Work
Landscape—Carlingford
Deviation Work
Illustrations (3) for Poems
Our Doll's Home on the Mountains
The Tunnel
Dora Creek (Last water-colour)

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